

Message Text

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S E C R E T BEIRUT 14315

EXDIS

FOR THE SECRETARY

E.O. 11562: GDS

TAGS: PFOR

SUBJECT: ASSIGNMENT OF US REPRESENTATIVES TO DAMASCUS

1. DURING VISIT TO DAMASCUS DEC 18 I DISCUSSED QUESTION OF ASSIGNMENT OF AMERICAN DIPLOMATIC PERSONNEL TO US INT SECTION OF ITALIAN EMBASSY DAMASCUS WITH PRESIDENT ASSAD, FOREIGN MINISTER KHADDAM, AND VICE MINISTER ISMAIL. ASSAD REAFFIRMED THAT HE WOULD WELCOME AMERICAN REPRESENTATIVES AT ANY TIME WE CHOOSE TO SEND THEM AND INDICATED THAT ARRANGEMENTS SHOULD BE WORKED OUT WITH FOREIGN MINISTRY. IN EARLIER MEETING, KHADDAM SAID HE WANTED TO ASSURE US OF SYRIA'S SINCERE WISH TO STRENGTHEN CONTACTS BETWEEN OUR TWO COUNTRIES. KHADDAM SAID SARG WILL WELCOME DIPLOMATS WE WILL BE SENDING TO DAMASCUS. HE SUGGESTED WE PURSUE DISCUSSION OF ARRANGEMENTS FOR ESTABLISHMENT OF U.S. STAFFED OFFICE IN DAMASCUS WITH VICE MINISTER ISMAIL.

2. ACCORDINGLY, DURING MEETING WITH ISMAIL IMMEDIATELY AFTERWARDS I ASKED FOR SYRIAN VIEWS ON (A) LEVEL OF REPRESENTATION; (B) NUMBER OF PERSONNEL, AND (C) TIMING OF ARRIVAL. I POINTED OUT THAT PRACTICE IN ARAB COUNTRIES WHERE USG HAS INTERESTS SECTIONS VARIES FROM IRAQ, WHERE OUR OFFICE IS HEADED BY MIDDLE LEVEL OFFICIAL, TO ALGERIA AND CAIRO, WHERE WE HAVE QUITE
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SENIOR OFFICERS AND RELATIVELY SIZEABLE STAFFS. AFTER SOME QUESTIONING BY ISMAIL AS TO WHAT WAS MEANT BY MIDDLE LEVEL REPRESENTATION, ISMAIL SAID HE THOUGHT FOLLOWING WOULD BE AGREEABLE TO SARG (A) ASSIGNMENT OF TWO AMERICAN DIPLOMATIC

OFFICERS TO USINT SECTION OF ITALIAN EMBASSY AND TWO OR THREE AMERICAN STAFF PERSONNEL; (B) INTEREST SECTION CHIEF COULD BE OF FIRST SECRETARY OR COUNSELOR RANK; (C) USG WELCOME TO OPEN ITS REPRESENTATION AT AN EARLY DATE, WITHIN A WEEK OR TEN DAYS IF IT SO DESIRES (ALTHOUGH IT WAS OBVIOUS SYRIANS NOT PRESSING US TO HAVE A REPRESENTATIVE IN DAMASCUS IN THAT TIME FRAME).

3. ISMAIL SAID THAT IF WE HAVE ANYTHING TO COMMUNICATE TO SARG ON THIS MATTER WHILE SECRETARY IS IN GENEVA WE MAY DO SO THROUGH SYRIAN REPRESENTATIVE THERE. OTHERWISE WE CAN MAKE CONTACT THROUGH SYRIAN UN MISSION IN NEW YORK.

4. SUGGEST DEPARTMENT REPEAT THIS CABLE TO EMBASSY ROME ALONG WITH APPROPRIATE INSTRUCTIONS FOR INFORMING ITALIANS OF OUR AGREEMENT WITH SYRIA FOR ASSIGNMENT OF U.S. DIPLOMATIC PERSONNEL TO DAMASCUS.
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